

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 SY-04 SCCT-02 NEA-14 IO-14

CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01

SP-03 SS-20 DRC-01 /138 W

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O 241323Z JUN 74

FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8403

INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY KIGALI BY POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L KHARTOUM 1501

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, SU

SUBJ: BSO TERRORIST TRIAL

REF: KHARTOUM 1495

1. SUMMARY. DETAILS VERDICT IN BSO CASE MAKE CLEAR
SUDANESE JUDICIAL PROCESS HAS BEEN EFFECTIVE DESPITE SPECIAL
PRESSURES IN CASE INVOLVING PALESTINIANS. END SUMMARY.

2. SUPERIOR COURT SESSION BEGAN ON SCHEDULE AT 10:00 AM
JUNE 24 BEFORE CROWD NEARLY 100 PEOPLE MOST OF WHOM
ADVOCATES, JUDGES AND LAW TRAINEES. COURT BEGAN BY ASKING
DEFENDANTS BY NAME TO STAND. CHIEF JUDGE ABDULLA ABU AGLA
READ SUMMARY OF WHAT HAD HAPPENED AND THEN DEALT WITH
DEFENSE ARGUMENTS (KHARTOUM 1416) AS FOLLOWS:

A. COMMON INTENTION WAS ESTABLISHED--PLAN WAS TO KEEP
HOSTAGES WHOSE "DESTINY WAS DEATH";

B. CONFESSIONS WERE ACCEPTABLE--DEFENDANTS HAD
BEEN FULLY WARNED OF RIGHTS AND CONSEQUENCES THIS
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VOLUNTARY ACT;

C. RE ARGUMENT THAT SOME OF DEFENDANTS MAY NOT HAVE PARTICIPATED IN ACTUAL SHOOTING, FIRST, THEY ALL EQUALLY RESPONSIBLE LEGALLY, AND SECOND, ALL CLAIMED IN CONFESSIONS TO HAVE PARTICIPATED:

D. RE SELF-DEFENSE, THIS ONLY APPLIED WHEN PERSON IN DANGER AND NONE OF DEFENDANTS HAD CLAIMED HOSTAGES IN ANYWAY THREATENED THEM. ARGUMENT OF SELF-DEFENSE "NOT A SHIELD FOR AGGRESSION".

3. JUDGE ABU AGLA THEN ANNOUNCED VERDICT OF GUILTY OF PREMEDITATED MURDER IN ACCORDANCE SUDAN CRIMINAL CODE ARTICLE 251. ACCUSED LIKEWISE GUILTY OF OTHER CHARGES CITED BY MAGISTERIAL INQUIRY (KHARTOUM 531) WITH EXCEPTIONS OF CRIMINAL INTIMIDATION (ARTICLE 441), USING FORGED DOCUMENTS (ARTICLE 140) AND VIOLATION OF PASSPORT AND VISA ORDINANCE ON WHICH THEY FOUND NOT GUILTY (FBIS REPORT ON THIS POINT THUS INCORRECT).

4. JUDGE THEN ASKED DEFENSE IF IT WISHED PRESENT WITNESSES AS TO CHARACTER OF DEFENDANTS. CHIEF DEFENSE COUNSEL AL-NASRI ASKED FOR TEN MINUTES WHICH GRANTED(AT THIS POINT SUDANESE SPECTATOR, APPARENTLY DERANGED, ROSE CLAIMING BE MEMBER BSO AND ASKED SPEAK. HE WAS ARRESTED AND TAKEN AWAY.) AFTER RECESS NASRI ADDRESSED COURT SAYING PALESTINIANS HAVE SACRIFICED MUCH AND DO NOT MIND GIVING EIGHT MORE LIVES. BUT HE CLAIMED THERE SHOULD BE DISTINCTION BETWEEN CRIMINAL AND POLITICAL OFFENSES AND CITED LEBANESE LAW AS EXAMPLE, ASSERTING IN LATTER CASE NEITHER DEATH NOR LIFE IMPRISONMENT WOULD BE IMPOSED. MOREOVER THROUGHOUT WORLD, INCLUDING THE US IN CASE SIRHAN AND IN ISRAEL ITSELF IN CASE JAPANESE RESPONSIBLE FOR LOD AIRPORT KILLINGS, COMMANDOS NEVER SENTENCED TO DEATH. PROSECUTOR THEN STATED THAT, AS DEFENDANTS FOREIGNERS, THERE NO RECORD OF ANY PREVIOUS OFFENSES. COURT AGAIN RECESSED FOR 30 MINUTES TO CONSIDER SENTENCE.

5. ON RECONVENING AT NOON, JUDGE ABU AGLA NOTED THAT ARTICLE 251 CARRIED WITH IT DEATH SENTENCE, BUT THAT CRIMINAL COURT CIRCULAR NO. 26 DID GIVE COV'T RIGHT TO IMPOSE LIFE IMPRISONMENT INSTEAD,IF CIRCUMSTANCES WARRANTED. COURT IN REACHING ITS CONFIDENTIAL

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DECISION HAD CONSIDERED: (A) FACT THAT DEFENDANTS HAD NOT INSISTED ON KILLING HOSTAGES, THEY HAD ALWAYS OFFERED ALTERNATIVE IF DEMANDS MET; (B) DEFENDANTS WERE MEN OF PRINCIPLE, MEMBERS OF ORGANIZATION ACTING UNDER ORDERS; (C) THEY DID NOT HAVE LUST FOR KILLING (APPARENTLY VARIATION ON POINTS A AND B); (D) THEY BELIEVED MEN KILLED BELONGED TO NATIONS WHICH PLAYED BIG ROLE IN FATE OF PALESTINIANS AND THAT THEY HAD RIGHT STRIKE AT THOSE NATIONS ANYWHERE; AND (E) DEFENDANTS WERE YOUNG MEN,

AGED 21 TO 27. THEREFORE, ACTING UNDER PROVISIONS CIRCULAR 26, COURT SENTENCED ALL EIGHT DEFENDANTS TO LESSER PENALTY OF LIFE IMPRISONMENT.

6. AT THIS POINT ALL DEFENDANTS, JOINED BY SMALL NUMBER OF PALESTINIAN STUDENTS IN COURT AND, FOR FIRST TIME SINCE COURT PROCEEDINGS BEGAN, BY THREE OR FOUR SUDANESE SEPCTATORS, STARTED SHOUT SLOGANS "LONG LIVE BSO, DOWN, DOWN USA, ETERNITY AND GLORY FOR PALESTINIAN REVOLUTION, ETC.". POLICE RESTORED ORDER AND DEFENDANTS WERE THEN LED AWAY.

7. ATMOSPHERE: COURT SECURITY EXTREMELY TIGHT THROUGHOUT, WITH STREET BLOCKED OFF FROM 5. A.M., NO PARKING PERMITTED IN AREA, EXTRA POLICE, ALL SPECTATORS SEARCHED. FOR FIRST TIME IN SUPERIOR COURT SESSIONS, PLO REP ABU KHEIR APPEARED. EMBASSY OBSERVERS NOTED THAT JUDGE ABU AGLA'S PRESENTATION WAS ELOQUENT AND EFFECTIVE.

8. COMMENT: AS EMBASSY ATTORNEY OPINED (KHARTOUM 1444), SENTENCE OF LIFE MAY NOT BE STRICTLY IN ACCORD WITH TERMS OF CRIMINAL COURT CIRCULAR AND ESTABLISHMENT PRECEDENT IN APPLYING IT. THIS HARDLY NORMAL CASE, HOWEVER, YAFD CHIEF PROSECUTOR (KHARTOUM 1444) DID CITE REASON WHY IT MIGHT BE BEST TAKE ALTERNATIVE REGARDLESS LEGAL DISTINCTIONS. SINCE DEATH SENTENCE WOULD HARDLY HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT IN ANY CASE, SENTENCES APPEAR CLEARLY MAXIMUM WHICH COULD HAVE BEEN EXPECTED. SUCH A CONVICTION IN AN ARAB COURT IN FACT SEEMS MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT. (EMBASSY ATTORNEY WHO IN DAMASCUS LAST WEEK FOR MEETING ARAB PARLIAMENTARIANS TOLD EMBOFF THAT PALESTINIANS THERE BERATED SUDANESE DELEGATION MEMBERS FOR SUDAN ESTABLISHING PRECEDENT THAT ACTIONS SUCH AS KHARTOUM ASSASSINATIONS WERE CRIMINAL OFFENSE.) PRECISE OUTCOME UNPUBLICIZED REVIEW PROCESS BY HIGH COURT, WHICH WE UNDERSTAND ALREADY INITIATED
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IS UNCERTAIN. HOWEVEWR, EMBASSY LAWYER NOW STATES NORMAL PROCEDURE WOULD NOT REQUIRE HIGH COURT TO REFER CASE TO NIMEIRI, SINCE DEATH PENALTY NOT INVOLVED. NIMEIRI COULD, HOWEVER, REQUEST FILE OR SIMPLY EXERCISE A DEGREE OF EXECUTIVE CLEMENCY, INCLUDING PARDON. HOPEFULLY NIMEIRI WILL ESTABLISH FURTHER UNPALATABLE PRECEDENT BY MAKING THOSE CONVICTED SERVE AT LEAST APPROPRIATE PORTIONS THEIR SENTENCES.

9. NEXT STEPS; THERE IS NO REQUIREMENT UNDER SUDANESE JUDICAL PROCEDURE FOR ANY FURTHER PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT IN THIS CASE, OR FOR REFERRAL CASE TO PRESIDENT. HOWEVER, NIMEIRI WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR EVENTUAL OUTCOME, IF ONLY BY HIS INACTION. GOS, OF COURSE, ALWAYS FREE ANNOUNCE HIGH COURT DECISION IN PRESS, BUT THERE IS NO REQUIREMENT TO DO SO. WE SHALL, HOWEVER, CONTINUE USE VARIEITY OF SOURCES KEEP CLOSE TRACK

OF CASE. AS POINT OF INTEREST, EMBASSY ATTORNEY TOLD US
SOMETIME AGO THAT UNDER SUDANESE LAW, LIFE IMPRISONMENT
ACTUALLY MEANS 20 YEARS WITH POSSIBILITY OF FOUR YEARS OFF
FOR GOOD BEHAVIOR. SUDAN ALSO HAS PRACTICE OF GRANTING PARDONS
PERIODICALLY-USUALLY ON INDEPENDENCE DAY--TO DESERVING
PRISONERS. THESE POINTS COULD CARRY WEIGHT IN NIMEIRI'S
DECISION LET JUDGMENT STAND OR INVOKE EXECUTIVE CLEMENCY.

10. FOR BRUSSELS. WE HAVE BRIEFED NEW BELGIAN CHARGE SAIES
RE FOREGOING. HE RECOMMENDING TO BRUSSELS THAT CASE BE DISCUSSED
DURING FORTHCOMING VISIT THERE GOS FONMIN KHALID.
BREWER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PARAMILITARY FORCES, UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE, TRIALS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 24 JUN 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: blochd0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974KHARTO01501
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740165-0521
From: KHARTOUM
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740620/aaaaaqz.tel
Line Count: 181
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: KHARTOUM 1495
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: blochd0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 JUN 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <04 APR 2002 by izenbei0>; APPROVED <18 JUN 2002 by golinofr>; WITHDRAWN <13 Jun 2005 by BoyleJA, PRIVACY>; RELEASED <16 JUN 2005 by powellba2>; APPROVED <20 JUN 2005 by blochd0>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BSO TERRORIST TRIAL
TAGS: PINS, SU, BSO
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005